

# Don't Make These Common Mistakes

**W**omen, more than men, tend to underplay their achievements, have less confidence in their skills and give themselves less credit for accomplishments. Are you sabotaging yourself with these common mistakes? Find out and become self-confident instead of self-effacing.

**1. Not believing you're good enough.** Women tend to set high, sometimes unreasonably high, standards for themselves. Even a woman with excellent experience might undersell herself. For example, I knew a woman who ran her own house cleaning service. She supported herself and her family with this small business. But when I asked her if she considered herself a businesswoman, she said no. She thought that, because her main work was cleaning houses, she was not a "real" businesswoman.

**2. Not asking almost everyone you know for help while job hunting.** Women generally are great at asking for help. Think of the common joke about women asking for directions when they're lost, while men stay lost. But when looking for jobs, women tend to keep their search to themselves, while men tell everyone they know that they're looking for a job. "Networking" is a scary word for a lot of women. A not-so-scary way to think about the "N" word is that you call all of your friends and former colleagues and ask them for ideas to help you find a new job.

**3. Not highlighting your experience, skills and knowledge.** I have critiqued many resumes in which women listed their job titles but did not explain the excellent skills they gained from those jobs. Most men I know will give themselves the benefit of any doubt—if they've done it before, even briefly, they'll list it as a skill. There is a place in-between saying you've done more than you actually can do and downplaying very real skills you have. Reread your resume and ask yourself if you're really emphasizing your abilities in the descriptions.

**4. Saying "I've never done that" instead of "I can learn that" or "I will learn that."** Women tend to underplay the ability to learn very fast. Once I worked with a man who never told a potential client that we had not done certain types of projects. He never lied either. All he told anyone who asked

us for any kind of work was, “We can do that.” What he taught me was that this kind of “can do” perspective can be more important than actual experience. Because we said we could do almost anything, we had a lot of clients who trusted us to do interesting projects. An added bonus was that we always learned something new!

**5. Believing that staying at home as a mom isn’t a job and doesn’t develop marketable skills.** Many stay-at-home moms tend to think that they don’t have any (or recent enough) professional skills. The skills mothers have include: project management, budgeting, negotiation/conflict resolution and tutoring. Certainly there are many more than these.

**6. Waiting for them to call you instead of calling to check on them.** This is the professional version of the woman waiting by the phone for the man to call. Of course it is not a good idea to pester a hiring manager. However, a friendly inquiry call once a week or so is professional. Generally, I keep calling for updates and to offer new information until I’m told, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” To my knowledge, hiring managers don’t use these kinds of calls as reasons not to hire someone.

**7. Trying to be everything in an interview. Sometimes we try too hard.** Sometimes interviewers are trying to see what you won’t agree to do. Sometimes we’re too accommodating. I remember when I was young and on my first job interview. I was not at all prepared for interviewing and when I was asked, “What could you contribute to this organization?” My answer: “Whatever you need.” The manager promptly offered me a job as an administrative assistant to file documents in their archives. Since I had just finished a master’s degree and specialized in communication, this was not the kind of job I had in mind. What a lesson to learn! Have a clear idea about what you can and will do.

**8. Not negotiating salary, benefits and working conditions.** Obviously, hiring managers have constraints with budgets and how much they can pay new hires. However, there is often negotiating room for salaries and benefits. There are only a few times I’ve heard about an interviewer withdrawing a job offer because a woman tried to negotiate a higher salary. What

could happen is that you ask for a higher salary and they can’t give it to you. Then you can decide not to accept the position. But, if you’d like a higher salary, you probably won’t lose the job offer by asking for more. If you can’t get more salary, you can try to negotiate benefits like more vacation, travel expenses, continuing education or a flexible schedule. Remember, if you have the job offer, the ball’s in your court to negotiate.

For more information:

<http://www.licenter.org/looking4/JobInterview.html>

<http://eachofus.com>

<http://www.advancingwomen.com/workplace/index.html>



Adopt a “can do” attitude.  
Be specific about your  
skills and abilities,  
including those developed  
in non-job situations.  
Be proactive in your job  
search; don’t give up!